**Political Science Question**

Author

Institutional Affiliation

Course Name

Professor’s Name

Date

**Political Science Question**

**How did sex become a civil liberty?**

As people interact with others, the first feature that is noticed about them is their gender. People identify and classify others according to their sexual orientation, such as male, female, or even transgender; transgender people’s expression and identity differs from that of their assigned sex at birth. It is through the social categorization theory that people develop certain attitudes and behaviors towards others, leading to prejudice and discrimination. Indeed, the differences between the biological sex and gender identity of a person can affect how society interacts with the individual and the freedom of expression. As a result, sex has become a civil liberty, whereby transgender people (those who change their birth sex to conform to their gender identity, those who cross-dress, or those that reject gender binaries) have to fight for their right of freedom and expression (Flores et al. 2018). Failure to conform to the sex that matches one’s birth (cisgender) puts one in conflict with social categorizations, a situation which has created controversial debates, whereby some people and political parties support the civil liberties of the transgender, while others oppose them.

The fight for civil liberties for the transgender people started in the 1990s through organized political movements across the United States. At the time, Phyllis Frye who was a transgender activist called for more representation of the transgender people. Frye’s efforts aimed at pushing Congress to pass bills legislating the civil rights of transgender, and gay and lesbian communities, including their inclusion in political interests and actions (Murib 2015). Today, many American adults have a high level of understanding of what transgender entails, but still, individuals are uncertain and anxious about the issue of transgender rights. Some policies, such as the use of restrooms and other public accommodations according to a person’s gender expression and identity as opposed to the gender assigned at birth, are still debatable. For instance, the 2015 ballot-initiative campaign held in Houston, Texas, repealed the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), also known as the “bathroom bill.” The bill sought to ban discriminative activities in city employment, private employment, housing, public accommodations and others, on the basis of national origin, race, and sex. Despite the good intentions behind the drafting of the HERO bill, the ordinance received massive criticism, with the repeal campaigns calling for gender-identity protections (Flores et al. 2018). The proponents for the repeal indicated that HERO would allow troubled men who identified as women to access women’s locker rooms, bathrooms, and showers. The Houston vote against the HERO ordinance was 61% against 43%, clearly marking the divisions in the American society around transgender rights (Flores et al. 2018). The polling results confirm that the topic of sex as civil liberty, especially around the issue of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) rights, is still debatable.

The rising attention to the rights of the LGBTQ community is also evident from the passing of North Carolina’s House Bill 2 (HB2) in 2016. Similar to Houston’s HERO ordinance, HB2 received enormous criticism, being called the “bathroom bill” for the same reasons as the HERO bill. While conservative groups supported the move by the Republicans to pass the bill, liberal groups and Democrats threatened to thwart its passage through legal action. Both the Republicans and the Democrats also indicated that they had the support of the public, with the former claiming that North Carolina does not value discrimination, while the latter stating that such values do not represent North Carolinas (Jones & Brewer 2020). The deep divide around the topic of sex and gender identity confirm that transgender rights are increasingly becoming public agenda.

The LGBTQ community is also exposed to multiple identity-based stressors, which can be best handled by engaging in civil rights movements. Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) youths undergo intense stigma, violence, and discrimination at school, home, and even in communities. Indeed, research shows that the rate of depression among the TGD people ranges between 52% and 54%, indicating a need to address the underlying causative factors, such as verbal, emotional, and physical rejection by friends and family, and marginalization (Austin et al. 2020). Another way to respond to the mental health problems affecting TGD youths is to form civil rights groups through the internet. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are a rich source of social networks and resilience from which the youth can create identities, share resources, and engage in community-based activities (Austin et al. 2020). Such avenues provide the transgender people with the necessary support to boost their self-esteem and ability to live authentically (being free to live with the new gender identity as opposed to the gender assigned at birth).

**Explain the politics that envelope people who identify as transgender**

Efforts to build and represent a uniform transgender identity in politics started with the efforts of Frye in the early 1990s. Frye’s statements at the time challenged the understanding of transgender identity, the types of political interests transgender people should pursue, and how such people can form coalitions with other minority groups, such as gays and lesbians. In response, Murib (2015) indicates that opposition, backlash, and resistance towards minorities, such as the transgender, help draw more attention towards the group, creating political conversations about sexuality. Additionally, backlash creates the need for political actors to develop avenues, such as bills, aimed at changing how communities perceive transgender people. In the process, old ways of thinking are replaced with new ones as the support and security for the new identity increases (Murib 2015). Therefore, as representatives of the transgender people, transgender interest groups are taking strategic steps to lobby policy-makers into recognizing the transgender identity. These goals aim at creating a universal view and understanding of the gender, and hopefully, opening up more opportunities and coalitions for the transgender people.

Another political aspect involving transgender people is the divide between the position of party elites. Both the Democrats and Republicans have since taken a position on transgender issues, with the Democratic Party approving of the LGBT rights movement. For instance, President Obama used Executive Orders to expand the rights of transgender people, while Republican Party representatives opposed the expansion, passing policies that took away the right to protect gender identities. The Republicans still support some aspects of transgender rights, such as protection from discrimination during employment, but these partisans still tend to be more disgusted by LGBT issues (Flores et al. 2018). Therefore, the lack of a consensus on the issue is a cause for concern as the state legislatures are divided on the policy framework to approve in furthering transgender-inclusive anti-discrimination laws.

Elite cues also play a critical role in creating political awareness for people who identify as transgender. Average citizens have low knowledge of and attention to politics; hence, they rely on political elites for information and attitudes shaping transgender-related policies. As more citizens follow their parties’ cues (polarization), so do their opinion on transgender rights align with the ideological position of the source. When more conservative and liberal elites unite to make their messages more intense and consistent, so does the public and the less aware citizens receive and accept them, and vice versa (Jones & Brewer 2020). Additionally, the level of education can affect the position taken by the elites. Liberals with greater educational achievements tend to express the greatest support for transgender rights, while conservatives with higher education show the least support (Jones & Brewer 2020). Therefore, the direction that transgender policies take is heavily dependent on the position taken by the part representatives and the accompanying elite cues.

References

Austin, A., Craig, S. L., Navega, N., & Mclnroy, L. B. (2020). It’s my safe space: The life-saving role of the internet in the lives of transgender and gender diverse youth. *International Journal of Transgender Health, 21*(1), 33-44, DOI: 10.1080/15532739.2019.1700202

Flores, A. R., Haider-Markel, D. P., Lewis, D. C., Miller, P. R., Tadlock, B. L., & Taylor, J. K. (2018). Challenged expectations: Mere exposure effects on attitudes about transgender people and rights. *Political Psychology, 39*(1), 197-216.

Jones, P. E., & Brewer, P. R. (2020). Elite cues and public polarization on transgender rights. *Politics, Groups, and Identities, 8*(1), 71-85. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1441722

Murib, Z. (2015). Transgender: Examining an emerging political identity using three political processes. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2015.1048257